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*THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE FUR
SEAL SERVICE*

THE report of the House Committee on Expenditures in the Department of Commerce and Labor, on the administration of the fur seal service, has been made public as House Report, No. 1425, 62d Cong., 3d Ses. It contains a majority report, signed by Representatives Rothermel (chairman), McDermott, Young and McGillicuddy; a statement of "views of the minority," and the minority report, signed by Representatives McGuire, Madden and Patton.

This committee, in the course of its investigation, held numerous hearings extending from May 31, 1911, to July 31, 1912. The testimony heard comprises 1,013 pages, with an appendix of correspondence and documents numbering 1,232 pages. The majority report is divided into 7 counts, five of which have to do with certain alleged harmful or unlawful acts of the two leasing companies which we need not now go into. They are ancient history, since the fur seal herd is now, and has been since 1910, in sole charge of the government.

The sixth item in the report deals with the period of government control, and states that "in spite of the express prohibition of the law, it is disclosed in the testimony that yearling and female seals have been killed by the agents of the government in charge of the seal islands." One looks in vain in the testimony for any such evidence. On the other hand, the testimony clearly shows that of the 13,500 skins taken in 1910 (of which 12,920 were sold in London in December of that year), the season under particular consideration, only 90 were under the standard weight of the two-year-old, as shown by the green weights taken by the agents on the islands, and only 92, by the salted weights of the London fur dealers. With these possible exceptions, no yearling animals were killed; and in the period from 1904 to 1911, in which the individual weights of over 90,000 skins were taken, only 700 skins were underweight. These exceptions may represent accidents or mistakes in judgment, it being necessary for the clubber to

judge the weight of the skin while the animal is alive. It was, furthermore, not against the law to kill yearlings; the prohibition in this case was by departmental regulation. The charge that females were killed depended upon the alleged commingling of the sexes in the yearling class. It is not a fact that the yearling males and females commingle on land, but this is not necessary to disprove the charge, as yearlings are shown not to have been killed, except in the few exceptional cases above noted.

The charge of killing yearlings was in itself a most insignificant one. Representative Townsend, whose resolution brought on the investigation, asserted in his opening address that 30,000 such animals had been killed. Mr. Henry W. Elliott, the complaining witness, placed the number at 128,000. The total number of animals killed by the North American Commercial Company during its twenty-year period scarcely exceeded 300,000. It may be noted that other testimony, by Mr. Alfred Fraser, showed that in this very same period more than a million seals had been killed at sea, of which we know from other sources fully 80 per cent. were gravid or nursing females. This fact together with all other facts relating to the effect of pelagic sealing upon the fur seal herd is ignored in the majority report.

Item 7 of the majority statement recites how "the testimony taken before the committee was the basis in large measure of the action of Congress . . . which establishes a closed term of five years . . . to all commercial killing of seals." The testimony nowhere discloses any valid reason for the suspension of commercial sealing. On the contrary, the testimony contains the positive assertions of such authorities as Dr. D. S. Jordan, of Stanford University; Dr. L. Stejneger, of the Smithsonian Institution; Dr. C. H. Merriam, late of the U. S. Biological Survey; Dr. F. A. Lucas, of the American Museum of Natural History; Dr. C. H. Townsend, of the New York Aquarium, and others, all of whom have visited the fur seal islands in recent years and made studies of the animals, to the effect that such suspension is not only not necessary, but

is likely to prove highly detrimental to the welfare of the herd.

The majority report is summed up in a series of recommendations. The first four provide for confiscation of the bond of the North American Commercial Company, for suit for damages against the original president of that company, for rectification of a wrong against Russia in the matter of a seizure of a sealing vessel—all matters foreign to the interests of the herd. The fifth recommendation only is pertinent and this we may give in full. It is as follows:

(5) That in view of the closed season of five years provided by act of Congress, of August 15, 1912, the services of the Treasury agents on the said Pribilof Islands can be dispensed with, resulting thereby in a saving to the Federal Government of approximately \$25,000 annually.

Presumably the act of Congress refers to the Sulzer bill which is actually of the date of August 25. There have been no treasury agents on the Pribilof Islands since 1903, when the islands were transferred to the Department of Commerce and Labor. But these are matters of detail. The important thing is that the government force on the islands is to be disbanded. These men have charge of 300 natives who must be governed, fed and clothed. The law still permits the killing of a few animals for natives' food. Their skins must be cared for. The blue foxes must be cared for and fed. There is a reindeer herd on each island. The rookeries are in need of betterment work, especially in the eradication of areas infested with the hookworm, destructive of the young pups. The recommendation of Mr. Rothermel and his colleagues would abandon the islands and their inhabitants to their own devices for five years. When left without restraint it is well known that the natives are unable to resist the temptation to kill pup seals for food. That they would kill thousands of young seals for that purpose, should the agents be absent, is certain. Are Mr. Rothermel and the three who united with him in this recommendation willing to assume the responsibility for this waste which is quite sure to take place if their advice

be accepted by congress? In return the government would effect a saving of \$54,750. (The salaries total only \$10,950 annually instead of \$25,000 as stated in the Rothermel report.) The suspension of land sealing which has paved the way for this magnificent stroke of economy involves the wasting of at least 63,000 superfluous males which at the age of three years would give skins worth \$40 each, a cash loss of \$2,500,000, to say nothing of the damage these animals will occasion to the mother seals and their helpless young by their fighting.

It is hard to see how this recommendation came to be written. Some explanation is deducible from a significant paragraph in the minority statement which follows:

Although the committee took more than 1,000 pages of testimony, and the last hearing was six months ago, on July 31, 1912, the committee has never held a single meeting for the purpose of considering the evidence, and the report made by the chairman was never submitted to the committee for its consideration; no meeting of the committee was ever held for this purpose, and we are not satisfied that it has been approved by a majority of the committee.

This interesting commentary is followed by further equally interesting comment, and then comes the minority report itself. This is an able document and treats the investigation from the only rational standpoint, the welfare of the herd. The charges are stated in detail. The natural history points necessary to an understanding of the problems are accurately set forth. The methods of land sealing and of pelagic sealing are discussed, with their effect on the herd. The charges are then specifically treated in the light of the testimony and found to be without support. The minority's conclusions are expressed in the following words:

We are convinced that the sole important cause of the decrease of the fur-seal herd during the last decade has been pelagic sealing, and that land killing, as practised on the Pribilof Islands during that time, has had nothing to do with the diminution of the herd.

After a careful examination and consideration of all the evidence, we find that the administration of the fur-seal service by the Department of Com-

merce and Labor and by the Bureau of Fisheries of that department has been in accordance with the law; that the regulations issued from time to time by the department and the instructions issued to the agents have been properly observed; that the fur-seal herd has been handled intelligently; and that the charges have not been sustained.

The charges of malfeasance brought with such a flourish against the Department of Commerce and Labor by Mr. Henry W. Elliott, with the support of Dr. William T. Hornaday and a very small minority of the Camp Fire Club, whom the majority report characterizes as "public spirited citizens," have proved a fiasco. It is said that they influenced the action of congress in suspending land sealing. We can well believe this. The aforesaid congressional action provides for the throwing away of \$2,500,000 worth of seal-skins, jeopardizes the permanence of a beneficent treaty which is essential to the only salvation of the herd, and inflicts upon the rookeries a horde of idle fighting bulls to work destruction among the breeding females and their young. There is a close resemblance between this ill-advised action of congress and the equally unwarranted investigation, as disclosed in the dual report of the committee conducting it.

If congress had wished to enact a law for the encouragement of pelagic sealing it could scarcely have done so more effectively than it did when it prohibited commercial killing on the land of the surplus male seals.

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February 11, 1913

THE ALPINE LABORATORY

THE Alpine Laboratory is situated at 8,500 feet on the Cog Railway between Manitou and the summit of Pikes Peak. The flora is both rich and varied, and in connection with the remarkable diversity of habitat found in this rugged mountain region offers exceptional opportunities for the study of plant response, and the origin of new forms. Among the alpine summits of the continent, Pikes Peak is unique in the series of great formational

zones which lies across its face. From the Great Plains grasslands, the series runs from valley woodland at 5,800 feet to mesa, chaparral, foothill woodland, pine forest, aspen woodland and spruce forest to alpine meadow, rock field and bog at 11,000-14,000 feet in a distance of 7 miles. From the very nature of the mountains, weathering, erosion and other physiographic factors bring about the almost countless repetition of the same or similar habitats, and produce numbers of primary and secondary successions illustrating a wide range of developmental processes and principles.

Ecological work was first done at Pikes Peak in 1899, and has been carried on each summer since that time. In consequence, it is probable that no other area has been so intensively studied by means of instrument and quadrat, and offers such a fascinating array of ecological problems for which the foundation has at least been sketched. The scope and nature of this foundation work is indicated by the following publications: "Development and Structure of Vegetation, 1904"; "Research Methods in Ecology, 1905"; "Relation of Leaf Structure to Physical Factors, 1905"; "Vegetation of the Mesa Region, 1906"; "Life History of the Lodgepole Burn Forests, 1909"; "Natural Vegetation as an Indicator, 1910"; "Wilting Coefficient, 1911," and "Development and Structure of Sandhill Vegetation, 1913."

The practical aspects of quantitative ecology are represented by the Fremont Forest Experiment Station, and the Dry-land Agriculture Field Station of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, perhaps the best equipped stations in the world for the exact study of vegetational problems.

The field of investigation open falls into four general divisions: (1) the use of quantitative methods of studying habitat and plant; (2) the application of ecological methods and principles to forestry, agriculture and plant pathology; (3) the measured study of individual response to the habitat with especial reference to the origin of species; (4) quadrat study of the development and structure of plant formations. The oppor-